

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER ELECT ROBERT DAVID MULDOON

REF: WELLINGTON 3815

SUMMARY. THE OCTOBER 1975 BIOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK ON NEW ZEALAND CONTAINS EXCELLENT TREATMENT OF MULDOON. THIS REPORT UPDATES MULDOON'S PROFILE BASED ON HIS PERFORMANCE AS LEADER OF THE NATIONAL PARTY DURING THE PAST 17 MONTHS. MULDOON HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE A LEADER OF GREAT DETERMINATION AND STAMINA WHO, ALMOST SINGLEHANDEDLY, REBUILT HIS PARTY AND BROUGHT IT BACK TO POWER WITH A MASSIVE MAJORITY. END SUMMARY.

1. MULDOON, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL PARTY VICTORY IN NEW ZEALAND'S NOVEMBER 29 ELECTIONS. THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP WAS A STRONG THEME IN HIS CAMPAIGN. HE ARGUED THAT HE COULD PROVIDE IT AND WILL NOW WANT TO BE SEEN TO BE DOING SO. A BEAR FOR WORK, HE WAS ON THE HUSTINGS ALMOST UNCEASINGLY FROM LATE 1974 TO THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN. HIS ONE-MAN CRUSADE BEGAN IN OCTOBER 1974 WITH A SERIES OF "MEET THE PEOPLE" EVENINGS THAT SOON BECAME THE BEST ATTENDED SHOW IN TOWN. FOCUSING ON THE ECONOMY AND RELATED ISSUES, HE ATTACKED THE LABOUR

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GOVERNMENT FOR MISMANAGEMENT AND LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

OF THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED. MULDOON'S THEME OBVIOUSLY STRUCK A SENSITIVE CHORD AS HE PULLED IN UNPRECEDENTED (FOR NEW ZEALAND) CROWDS NUMBERING 800 TO 1,500 IN A DOZEN MEETINGS BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. HE RETURNED TO THE ROAD IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR AND AVERAGED FOUR OF FIVE MAJOR MEETINGS A MONTH THROUGH OCTOBER.

2. THE MEETINGS FOLLOWED A SET PATTERN. WORKING FROM A STANDARD SET OF NOTES MULDOON WOULD HAMMEN AT THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN ECONOMIC AREAS AND BRING OUT A SET OF CHARTS SHOWING THE RECORD OF OVERSEAS BORROWING, INFLATION AND INCREASED HOUSING COSTS. HE PROMISED LITTLE IN THE WAY OF RELIEF, SAYING THE SITUATION WAS SO BAD THAT NO MATTER WHICH PARTY WAS ELECTED IT WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE BORROWING NEXT YEAR. HE FORECAST AN INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT AND, AT BEST, A REDUCTION IN THE RATE OF INFLATION ONLY DOWN TO TEN PERCENT FROM THE PRESENT FIFTEEN PERCENT LEVEL. HE BLAMED HIGH LEVELS OF IMMIGRATION AS THE MAIN REASON FOR SKY-ROCKETING HOUSING COSTS AND SAID HE WOULD PARE THE INFLOW OF PERMANENT RESIDENTS TO THE BONE. COMIC RELIEF WAS PROVIDED BY HIS RAZOR-SHARP RETORTS TO HECKLERS.

3. IN SUM, MULDOON TOLD NEW ZEALANDERS THEY WERE LIVING BEYOND THEIR MEANS AND WOULD HAVE TO TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS. HE DID THIS IN THE BLUNT, OCCASIONALLY ABRASIVE STYLE THAT HAS BECOME HIS HALLMARK. IN DOING SO HE INCURRED THE WRATH OF SOME. A CERTAIN NUMBER OF BLUE-HAIRED OLD LADIES AND ELDERLY GENTLEMEN, SOME EVEN PAST NATIONAL VOTERS SAID MULDOON WOULD NEVER DO AS PRIME MINISTER AND THEY HARKENED BACK TO THE DAYS OF KEITH HOLYOAKE AND JOHN MARSHALL. LABOR LEADERS ACCUSED HIM OF BEING A "UNION BASHER" AND THE WORDS "FASCIST" AND "DICTATOR" ENJOYED A HIGH DEGREE OF CURRENCY IN LEFTIST CIRCLES. MULDOON WAS POLITICALLY ADEPT ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE THAT HIS PERSONAL STYLE UPSETS SOME PEOPLE AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ON AT LEAST TWO OCCASIONS DURING THE
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PAST YEAR HE ANALYZED HIS POSITION AND THEN CONSIDERABLY TONED DOWN HIS RHETORIC.

4. PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING TRAIT DISPLAYED BY MULDOON DURING HIS CAMPAIGN WAS HIS EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC MATTERS AS HE CARRIED THE WORD TO THE PEOPLE WITH A FAITH THAT WOULD HAVE EMPRESSED A MISSIONARY. COMBINED WITH THIS WAS A DEGREE OF STAMINA NOT NORMALLY

EXHIBITED BY NEW ZEALAND POLITICIANS. HIS SERIES OF ONE NIGHT STANDS WOULD HAVE DESTROYED THE CONSTITUTION OF A LESSER MAN. OUT OF IT ALL COMES A PICTURE OF A MAN ABSOLUTELY SURE OF HIMSELF, VERY ELL IN CONTROL OF HIS FACTS, AND WILLING TO WORK AS HARD AS NECESSARY TO CONVINCE THE PEOPLE OF NEW ZEALAND THAT HE IS RIGHT. AT THE SAME TIME HIS ALMOST CONSTANT FOCUS ON THE ECONOMY LEADS ONE TO WONDER HOW MUCH THIS WILL COLOR HIS APPROACH TO OTHER FACETS OF GOVERNMENT. HOW, MUCH, FOR EXAMPLE, DOES HIS APPRECIATION OF ECONOMICS INFLUENCE HIS VIEWS ON HEALTH, EDUCATION OR SOCIAL WELFARE? THIS QUESTION IS LARGEY UNANSWERED AND WILL HAVE TO REMAIN THAT WAY UNTIL HIS GOVERNMENT HAS HAD TOME TO FLESH-OUT ITS POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN THESE FIELDS.

5. OF DIRECT INTEREST TO THE U.S., MULDOON'S ASSUMPTION OF POWER WILL MEAN GENERALLY MORE FAVORABLE BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE HAS TERMED LABOUR'S SOUTH PACIFIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONE IMPRACTICAL AND HAS A GENERALLY POSITIVE ATTITUDE CONCERNING NPW VISITS. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, HIS DISINCLINATION TO KEEP THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO TO HIMSELF, AS LABOR PRIME MINISTER ROWLING HAD DONE, IS A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS BELIEF THAT FOREIGN RELATIONS IS NOT ONE OF NEW ZEALAND'S MAJOR AREAS OF INTEREST.

6. WHIL MULDOON ISKEENLY INTERESTED IN THE U.S., IT SHOULD NOT BE AUTOMATICALLY ASSUMED THAT HE IS OVERLY ENAMOURED OF OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM. INTERVIEWED ON TV TWO DAYS AFTER THE ELECTIONS HE SAID, " . . . THE AMERICAN SYSTEM IS ALMOST TOTALLY MADE FOR DISASTER.." ASKED TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF, MULDOON ADDED, "WELL, YOU'VE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOT A SYSTEM THAT'S 200 YEARS OLD, A SYSTEM O CHECKS AND BALANCES IN A WORLD OF INSTANT COMMUNICATIONS AND INSTANT TRAVEL AND THE THING IS NOT CAPABLE, I THINK, OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY, THE STRONGEST ECONOMY IN THE WORLD. THEY CAN'T EVEN CHANGE THE VALUE OF THEIR CURRENCY TODAY WITHOUT REFERRING TI BACK TO CONGRESS, AND THIS IS SOMETHING THAT'S GOT TO BE DONE OVERNIGHT. THE PRESIDENT CAN DECLARE WAR BUT WHEN YOU GO A STEP BEYOND THAT YOU'VE GOT THIS TERRIBLE SYSTEM OF CONGRESSIONAL CHECKS AND BALANCES. AND I REGARD THAT AS A MAJOR THREAT."

7. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT IN DISCUSSING THE U.S. MULDOON SHOUL FIRST MENTION THE ECONOMY ANDTHEN DRAW ON AN ECONOMIC AREA FOR HIS PRIME EXAMPLE OF WHAT

IS WRONG WITH THE SYSTEM. AS NOTED ABOVE HE IS
ESSENTIALLY AN ECONOMIST AND HE SEES NEW ZEALAND
AND THE WORLD ALMOST ENTIRELY IN ECONOMIC TERMS.
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